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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000528

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TAGS: PGOV MCAP PHUM PREL VE
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ SEEKS REVOLUTIONARY LOYALTY

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Classified By: Daniel Lawton, Acting Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) sponsored a week of activities to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the failed 2002 coup attempt. In a series of nationally televised speeches Chavez attacked the United States and the "Venezuelan oligarchy" while stressing the theme of loyalty to his Bolivarian revolution. He also announced the creation of a separate command structure for the National Reserve and a new anti-poverty social program. While Chavez appeared to be using the commemoration of the April 2002 events to shore up his sagging popularity, he neither attracted the crowds nor generated the fervor to which he is accustomed. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) staged a series of political and social activities in observance of the short-lived 2002 coup against Chavez' and praising the "fierce people" of Venezuela. Caracas hosted a "World Peace Council" of 128 leftist NGOs from 82 countries that recognized Venezuela as being "the standard bearer in the anti-imperialist struggle," and praised the "fighting spirit" of the Venezuelan people as they shook off the 2002 coup. Other events included the MFA's commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the assassination of Colombian Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a special session of the National Assembly and candle vigil at the Laguna Bridge where 19 died in clashes between Chavista and opposition groups, as well as a special exhibition honoring Emiliano Zapata by the Ministry of Culture.

NEW PRAETORIAN GUARD

¶3. (SBU) The BRV also organized a large military parade on April 12 in honor of the "Day of the Reserves" and in conjunction with the "Rescue of National Dignity" or counter-coup. The event featured a fly-over by 11 newly purchased Su-30 FLANKER Russian fighter aircraft and three Mi-35 HIND attack helicopters, locally known as the CARIBE. As reserve units marched in the vanguard of the parade, the announcer stressed their role in social development, food security, environment and national defense. The parade coincided with presidential decree 3560 which created the Reserve and Mobilization Command (Septel) directly controlled by President Chavez and with a separate budget. Addressing the parade, Chavez jeered at the "empire" for failing to bring down his administration, derided the International Monetary Fund for being the "financial arm of the empire," and scoffed at ONDCP Director Walters' tour of Europe. Loyalty, however, was the centerpiece of the speech. Chavez

stressed that Venezuelans "must be loyal to ourselves, loyal to our roots."

MISION 13 ABRIL

¶4. (SBU) Chavez concluded ceremonies for the week by leading an April 13 mass rally in Caracas. Despite free bus and subway service, the crowd looked significantly smaller and less animated than previous Chavez rallies. Chavez thanked the loyal soldiers who returned him to power, especially Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello and former Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel, and other "loyal comrades of the revolution." Coverage of the rally in the pro-government tabloid "VEA" bannered with "Venezuela pledges its loyalty to the Bolivarian Revolution." Chavez pledged solidarity with neighboring leftist leaders, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa. Chavez praised Correa's idea of an organization of Latin American states without the U.S. or Canada. Chavez received his greatest applause when he announced "Mision 13 Abril," a new social program to address the needs of 15 million poor Venezuelans and to be financed with up to USD 250 million from his proposed oil windfall profit tax. The second phase of this mission would be the formation of "socialist communes," part of an idea included in constitutional reforms rejected in the December 2007 referendum. Chavez called this an effort "to plant socialism from below" to achieve the "supreme social happiness that Karl Marx spoke of."

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Chavez appears to be returning to more revolutionary rhetoric three months following his failed attempt at constitutional reforms. He explicitly applied his "which side are you on" loyalty message to exhort his supporters to achieve PSUV victories in the November state and local elections. Putting the National Reserve Command under direct presidential control suggests Chavez remains deeply distrustful of his military. Mission April 13 appears to be repeating the efforts of prior social missions, by

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implication confirming that the existing missions were less effective than the BRV had hoped and that Chavez needs to shore up his core constituency with more money. The socialist communes are a hint of how Chavez will revisit his failed constitutional reforms in order move his vision ahead despite his December 2007 referendum defeat.

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